



Western Reserve Land Conservancy
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Northern Ohio Groups Using Collaboration, Federal Dollars to Clean Up Ohio's Waters

JANUARY 29, 2020 (Willoughby, OH) – Federal dollars are supporting a model for effective, regional collaboration to protect Ohio's waters that can be replicated across Ohio and the nation. The Chagrin River Watershed Partners (CRWP), Western Reserve Land Conservancy and West Creek Conservancy (WCC) are utilizing funding to protect and enhance streams, rivers and lakes throughout northern Ohio.

In 2017, the groups received \$200,000 in funding from the Healthy Watersheds Consortium Grant Program, which is supported through the U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities, the U.S. EPA and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service. The groups matched the grant with \$200,000 of local in-kind contributions to support a regional collaboration of watershed organizations and land trusts to protect and steward healthy stream corridors that flow into Lake Erie.

"The Healthy Watersheds Consortium grant has enhanced the connections between northeast Ohio land trusts and watershed organizations, leading to on-the-ground protection of our streams and Lake Erie," said Kimberly Brewster, Deputy Director at Chagrin River Watershed Partners. "This project has also given us a unique opportunity to learn from people who are working to protect watersheds across the Great Lakes Region and the entire nation, helping us develop innovative approaches and financing mechanisms being used in other areas that could also work here in Northeast Ohio."

"Clean water starts with the land," said Rich Cochran, president and CEO of Western Reserve Land Conservancy. "We're proud to have capitalized on federal funding to create a collaborative partnership with other groups sharing the same vision for northern Ohio. By pooling our knowledge and resources, we can protect watersheds across the state and ensure a healthy and vibrant future for all of Ohio."

"Conservation through collaboration is an undeniable asset for Northeast Ohio," said Derek Shafer, Executive Director of West Creek Conservancy. "Coordinating local, State and Federal resources is imperative to truly provide a sustainable and economically viable region and we're thankful for the support provided by the Endowment's Healthy Watershed Consortium Program."

In the last year of a 3-year grant, this project is undertaking a regional approach to protect healthy watersheds through land preservation, stream corridor enhancements, and local and regional planning.

During the first two years of this grant, the partners have permanently protected over 30 miles of stream and 5,000 acres of land. A few examples of these efforts are highlighted below:

West Creek Conservancy Activity Spotlight:

Working in a unique partnership with The Nature Conservancy, West Creek Conservancy coordinated the preservation of 119 acres in the headwaters of the Cuyahoga River, in Montville Township, Geauga County. Design and engineering are currently underway to fully restore over 45 acres of wetlands, 70-acres of forested buffers, and nearly $\frac{3}{4}$ mile of stream channel. Protecting and restoring water resources where they begin is a unique opportunity and is imperative to sustaining overall watershed health. Additionally, this acquisition adds to preservation efforts of the nearby Geauga Park District, Observatory Park.

Western Reserve Land Conservancy Activity Spotlight:

Along the shore of Lake Erie, a few miles east of Conneaut, Ohio and a few hundred feet west of the Pennsylvania border, 602 acres of a regionally significant wildlife, outdoor and recreation area will be permanently protected thanks to the efforts of Western Reserve Land Conservancy and the Ashtabula County Metroparks. The property includes 236 acres of wetlands and over 3,000 linear feet of tributary streams. Forested wetlands become young forests and shrub wetlands, habitat for a variety of Ohio wildlife. More than 1.5 miles of the Lake Erie tributary of Turkey Creek runs through the property into a natural estuary where the creek meets the Lake. Nearly one mile of Lake Erie coastline is permanently conserved, providing dramatic bluffs, stone beaches and majestic views. Conserving this property not only saves a special part of northern Ohio, it also provides opportunities to keep waters flowing into Lake Erie clean and healthy.



Turkey Creek Estuary, a 604-acre public-access property adjacent along the Ohio state line with Pennsylvania's 3,400-acre Roderick Wildlife Preserve.

Chagrin River Watershed Partners Activity Spotlight:

This project is also a partnership with the Central Lake Erie Basin Collaborative, a network of organizations and volunteer-based initiatives that work collaboratively to protect and restore natural areas and promote stormwater solutions for healthy streams and Lake Erie. Through this grant project, CRWP and WCC provide technical services to Central Lake Erie Basin Collaborative watershed organizations and communities for the protection of healthy watersheds. For example, CRWP assisted Ashtabula County Metroparks with development of a \$198,612 Clean Ohio Fund grant application, which was awarded for the protection of 52 acres of riparian forest and wetlands along Conneaut Creek, a state designated Wild and Scenic River. The protection of this land will help maintain full attainment of Conneaut Creek's exceptional warmwater habitat aquatic life use designation by the Ohio EPA. This project was identified in the City of Conneaut's 2017 Comprehensive Plan Update as a high priority conservation area recommended for protection, acquisition, and public access improvements.



Through the Healthy Watersheds Consortium grant project, Chagrin River Watershed Partners is assisting Central Lake Erie Basin Collaborative partners with watershed protection projects, including grant writing assistance to Ashtabula County Metroparks for the protection of 52 acres along Conneaut Creek.

This project is also integrating the efforts of watershed organizations and land trusts to leverage our impact and accelerate progress towards protection of Lake Erie and the region's watersheds. For example, Western Reserve Land Conservancy, WCC, and CRWP held a regional watershed summit for Ohio watershed organizations on October 3rd, 2018. This event was held in conjunction with the Land Conservancy's Dominion Energy Watershed Mini Grant Awards Ceremony and was hosted at their

Conservation Center in Moreland Hills, Ohio. The summit was designed to encourage sharing of watershed protection priorities among land trusts, watershed organizations, regional planning agencies and other partners, and help us propose incentives for integration of watershed protection within conservation plans and transportation financing programs. Attendees participated in discussion sessions around three themes: prioritization of land protection projects, conservation zoning as a tool for watershed protection, and strategies for watershed protection and restoration in urban areas. Each discussion session allowed the project partners to answer questions and gain feedback from participants. This feedback will help us improve sharing of watershed protection priorities and incorporation of watershed protection goals into local and regional plans.



Kim Brewster and Josh Myers of Chagrin River Watershed Partners discuss conservation zoning as a tool for healthy watershed protection at the regional watershed summit on October 3, 2018.

The project partners had an opportunity to showcase this collaboration on a regional stage during a Great Lakes Regional Watershed Protection Summit held in Detroit, MI, on May 7th. The meeting engaged national, regional and state agencies, nonprofit organizations, and consulting firms that work in land and water protection to generate learning, discussion and information-sharing on emerging and important conservation finance opportunities for long-term watershed protection in the Great Lakes Region. The goal of the summit was to spur the development of conservation financing for watershed protection in the Great Lakes region. The meeting was sponsored by the U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities, Healthy Watersheds Consortium, and organized by four Great Lakes organizations that have received funding from the Endowment: Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper, Chagrin River Watershed Partners, Huron Pines, and the Huron River Watershed Council. Over 50 people attended from a variety of organizations within the Great Lakes region. The summit featured regional and multi-state scale land protection projects and innovative partnerships. Attendees ended the day with a discussion of follow-up actions to implement innovative land protection and possible financing mechanisms for watershed protection in the Great Lakes region.

Background

In Ohio, the area of land where water drains to Lake Erie's Central Basin extends from Conneaut Creek at the Ohio-Pennsylvania border all the way to the Sandusky Bay in Erie County. This area, also called a watershed, features many unique and high quality habitats including state designated wild and scenic rivers, coldwater and seasonal salmonid streams, and intact forested riparian corridors. Lake Erie is the most biologically productive of all the Great Lakes and provides habitat for a diverse fishery, migratory birds, and other biota. As the shallowest, warmest, and most densely populated of the Great Lakes, Lake Erie is also the most susceptible to the water quality impacts of urbanization. As the population of northern Ohio urban areas migrates to the suburbs, impervious land cover increases, exacerbating flooding, erosion and pollution in watersheds draining to Lake Erie's Central Basin. However, local watershed organizations and land trusts are working together on a regional approach to protect our healthy watersheds and Lake Erie.

Organizations and volunteer groups currently participating in the Central Lake Erie Basin Collaborative include The Nature Conservancy, Firelands Coastal Tributaries Watershed Program, Friends of Old Woman Creek, Friends of Huron River, Friends of Vermilion River, Black River Area of Concern, Plum Creek, Rocky River Watershed Council, West Creek Conservancy, Mill Creek Watershed Partnership, Big Creek Connects, Tinker's Creek Watershed Partners, Friends of Yellow Creek, Friends of the Crooked River, Chippewa Creek, Brandywine Creek, Middle Cuyahoga, Breakneck Creek, Cuyahoga River Restoration, Doan Brook Watershed Partnership, Bluestone Heights, Friends of Euclid Creek, Chagrin River Watershed Partners, Mentor Marsh, Arcola Creek, McKinley Creek and the Grand Ashtabula Conneaut Partnership. Watershed program staff from Erie, Cuyahoga and Lake County Soil and Water Conservation Districts also participate in the Collaborative. More information about the Collaborative can be found at www.centrallakeerie.org

The Healthy Watersheds Consortium Grant Program expands the pace of proactive watershed protection in the U.S. through conservation and improved stewardship of hundreds of thousands of acres of lands that provide drinking water, flood risk reduction, and an array of economic and environmental benefits. The Healthy Watersheds Consortium Grant Program is co-funded by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Natural Resources Conservation Service and the U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities, which manages the partnership. For more information about the Healthy Watersheds Consortium Grant Program, visit <http://www.usendowment.org/healthywatersheds.html>

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